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“A Pact of Genocidaires” - Shir Hever on the Global Arms Trade Fuelling the Genocide in Gaza - Full Interview

We sat down with the renowned economist and researcher Shir Hever. In this conversation, Hever explains how Israel's genocide in Gaza has been sustained by international complicity - especially from Germany, which remains one of Israel's most crucial military partners. We recorded on September 30th, 2025, before the current partial ceasefire in Gaza came into effect in October 2025. This is a transcript of the full interview.

Ruth Rohde

Hi, Shir. Thank you so much for joining today so we can discuss a little bit about the current state of arms exports to Israel and foreign support for Israel's genocide and military occupation of Palestine with a specific focus also on Germany.

Shir Hever

Thanks for having me, Ruth. It's great to speak with you.

Ruth Rohde

You are widely regarded as one of the key experts on the Israeli arms industry and arms trade. And maybe just explain to our audience a little bit, how did you first get involved in this work? How did you get to this point where you are now?

Shir Hever

I've been working on studying the Israeli occupation and the apartheid system for over 20 years. And actually it was the people that I worked with, the colleagues in different organizations, especially joint Palestinian-Israeli organizations, which asked me a lot of questions about the Israeli arms industry. That's why I also wrote my PhD on this topic. But I find that my most important qualification that makes it possible for me to find out things that are not really known so much is the fact that I speak Hebrew as my native language. There is so much information that Israeli officers are discussing among themselves, giving interviews, writing books in Hebrew, and it's not really available to most of the researchers, which many researchers who are critical of Israel's crimes don't really speak Hebrew.

Ruth Rohde

Yeah, absolutely. And I think we will talk a little bit later also about the differences in that reporting. Now, obviously in after October 7th, 2023, the ethnic cleansing of Palestine reached a new level and we had the start of the more formally declared genocide. And so in your estimate, which are the countries that have been the main

suppliers to Israel, specifically of weapons during the genocide? Obviously not the only form of complicity, but one of the key ones.

Shir Hever

You're making a very important distinction here when you talk about how things have changed after October 7th, because even though Israeli propaganda always likes to say that history began on October 7th, even though Israel has been committing ethnic cleansing and killing a lot of Palestinians, especially civilians even before, but I do think something changed. And the reason that Israel is now accused of genocide, and I do believe that what Israel is doing is genocide, I'm certainly not the only one who believes this, this is becoming a consensus position, is also manifested in the fact that Israel is using different weapons. Because the Israeli arms industry specialized in a kind of niche where they develop weapons for occupation, for oppression, for control of populations, meaning guns that deliver injuries and inflict a lot of pains, but are not necessarily designed to kill. And things like tear gas and biometric surveillance equipment and cameras, which are designed to control people, to incarcerate them. And when Israel has started really with the purpose of exterminating people in large numbers, they rely more and more on foreign weapons that are being imported. So of course, the biggest exporter is the United States. There are different estimates by how much, but it's certainly more than 60%, that's the lowest estimate of how many of the weapons are coming from the US. But this is in terms of monetary value, mostly. Then number two is Germany. We talk a lot about Germany, but actually, there are a lot of different countries that are also providing weapons that are worth mentioning maybe very briefly some countries that are very surprising. Especially if we're talking about dual-use items [goods with military or non-military application, editor's note], then this also includes energy products. So suddenly it becomes clear that Colombia was one of the most important sources of energy to Israel because it was the biggest coal exporter to Israel, but they stopped because they realized that the coal is fueling the genocide. And even South Africa being the second biggest exporter of coal to Israel. Not exactly a country that we would expect to be helping the genocide, but they have yet to make an official declaration that they stopped the coal exports. And then we have a lot of other materials. We have, for example, India, which is a major customer of Israeli weapons, an importer of Israeli weapons. But now the Adani Group in India, a major industrial group, is reselling the drones, the Hermes drones, to Israel that it produces under license from an Israeli arms company in India. And we have Serbia as one of the major suppliers of weapons to Israel. But many other countries in West Europe, like the UK, Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, France, are also providing various kinds of weapons, components, parts. I should not forget Italy, of course, which are very important to a very complex war machine that Israel has. And one of the most important issues is that when Israel is making their own weapons, like the artillery shells or the bombs, they usually have some small parts that they are not able to produce themselves. And then they have no choice but to import them. And sometimes the countries that are providing those components are surprising. It could be some country in Africa that has a surplus of detonators for artillery that they haven't used, and Israel is willing to pay very large amounts of money to buy those

detonators. And so suddenly there would be countries that never traded weapons before with Israel that begin to trade. And Israel is using a lot of quadcopters, the small drones, which they turn into suicide drones and blow them up on people. And the only country that can make the engines for those quadcopters is China. And China usually doesn't agree to sell weapons to Israel, but now they are.

Ruth Rohde

I think it's a really important point that you raise. I think, in case some people don't know, I mean, dual use goods are goods that could be used for civilian or military purposes normally. But also when it comes to components, I think this is something that we've seen repeatedly where there is some confusion in the statistics about who the major suppliers of weapons to Israel are, because some international mechanisms to monitor the arms trade, only consider major weapons and large assembled weapons systems. But now we're also talking about the smaller components like detonators and those kinds of things. So I wanted to ask you about that. Obviously, the US is a key supplier of things also like bombs, like the very visible things that explode in people's homes. But so what impact in your view would it have if «smaller» suppliers were to stop their arms trade with Israel, say a UK that doesn't often show up in the sort of major weapons trade statistics, but as part of the F-35 supply chain, for example, which is one of the main fighter jets used by Israel, or say a Serbia or a Romania or an India were to stop trading military goods, essentially, with Israel and dual-use goods.

Shir Hever

It's already happening. And this is one of the things that I can see when I'm following the Hebrew media very closely. And I see that the Israeli soldiers are complaining, the officers are complaining, that they have to be very careful about how much ammunition they're using. And I imagine that our readers are aware that Israel is weaponizing artificial intelligence. And there's been the very important research by Yuval Abraham from +972 magazine about the use of the lavender system, the gospel, the alchemist, where's daddy, these artificial intelligence systems that mass-produced targets in Gaza, which allows Israel to really systematically kill 10s of thousands of people, or even theoretically, 2 million people. Because if you really count the number of targets, it would be enough to really kill everybody in Gaza. Yuval Abraham wrote an update article where he said, the officers told him that they had to stop using the system at some point because it was too wasteful in ammunition. Because of the efforts of military embargo by different countries, and we know these were not the US and not Germany, they're not the biggest suppliers, but actually the smaller ones, that said, we don't want to send the materials, some explosives, detonators, or the materials to make the detonators, like there's a specific kind of explosive that is very fast burning that can be made into detonators. And those shipments have been stopped. So Israel had to become very economical in the use of ammunition and could no longer mass carpet bomb, large, densely populated parts of Gaza. And so it already has a major impact. But of course, it's not enough because Israel continues to bomb.

Ruth Rohde

I have a few questions toward the end about how to stop this supply of weapons in general. But before we get to that, I wanted to stick a little bit with our topic about what even the contributions are specifically from Germany. I mean, Germany is a country that has gotten quite a lot of attention for its role in supporting Israel, including a case at the International Court of Justice brought by Nicaragua. But so in terms of weapons, what would you say have Germany's sort of key contributions been to the genocide and to the ongoing sort of military occupation of Palestine?

Shir Hever

I think it's very important to understand that it's not just the weapons. Maybe now is not the time for us to talk about all the ways that Germany is supporting the genocide and enabling Israel economically, diplomatically, but to focus on the weapons, just to put it in the right framework, that it's not just that. But in terms of the weapons, there has been a very comprehensive report written by Forensic Architecture, and because it's so long and detailed, I will not attempt to summarize everything here, but certainly it's very important that Germany is providing Israel with every different kind of weapon in terms of every different platform of battle or arena of battle is something where German weapons play a role. From the scopes of rifles to warships that are bombarding Gaza from the sea to drones where and aircraft. So there's really, and most importantly, I think, is artillery. The main company in Germany that is making their artillery, Rheinmetall, continues to argue that they are not selling to Israel. But what they are doing, actually, is exchanging technology with Israel. And together with Israel's Elbit systems, they've developed a new kind of cannon, which is a self-loading cannon. And this 155-millimeter cannon has become by far the most lethal weapon Israel is using in Gaza. Israel only has about 10 of these cannons because they have the prototypes that they've co-developed with Germany. So they don't need to buy the cannons. The limiting factor, the bottleneck factor, is how much ammunition they have. Because each one of those cannons, which is self-loading, can fire 500 shells per 24 hours. 500 shells, each one of them weighs 45 kilograms. And so that's about 10 tons per day. And if you have 10 of those cannons, it's 100 tons per day. And that's already a shipload, a shipload of ammunition. So the real limit on how much Israel can fire is... the amount of ammunition, this is Germany's fault. This is because Rheinmetall has provided this technology to Israel. And I think it's also important to mention that the infantry in Gaza are using the Matador shoulder-mounted missile, which is designed and marketed as an anti-tank missile, but Israel is using it against apartments where people, families are living and killing civilians with this weapon. This weapon has been co-developed and co-produced with the German company Dynamit Nobel. And there is also the Sig Sauer light machine gun that Israel is incorporating, which is a German company, but it's not, the factory is actually not based in Germany.

Ruth Rohde

Right. I do think, as you mentioned, there's a lot of things still that we don't even know fully, like the contributions of a company like Rheinmetall, for example, as well as I think in the German debate, it's sometimes, especially the naval platform that you mentioned, the warships, the submarines, those are things that are sometimes

under-discussed, even though they form a huge part of the, at least in value, in the arms trade from Germany to Israel. And I think policymakers especially tend to be quite dismissive of the role that these weapons play in the genocide. And I think, especially now that we're at a stage where there is such a clear case of a blockade, in violation of the provisions as well as the International Court of Justice. I think we can really see the role that the naval ships also are playing, will play when we see the global flotilla to bring aid to Gaza [a coalition of civilian ships sailing to Gaza to break the Israeli siege, editor's note], for example, now approaching the shore and the role that these ships will play in upholding this blockade. Speaking of basically things that we don't really know about, what would you say are maybe some of the key unanswered questions about the way that Germany is arming Israel? I don't know if you have any like that you feel like would be particularly important to know that we just don't have the full information on because the government is just extremely not very open, let's say, about the way that they're actually supporting Israel militarily. And in the same vein, sort of, are there discrepancies that you're seeing between what you're seeing in German versus English versus sort of Hebrew media where we're talking about like German military support for Israel?

Shir Hever

Well, my curiosity aside, I think when we're asking the question, what questions are unanswered, I'm putting aside now all of the questions that I have as a researcher about what kind of weapons and how do they work and what components and materials are coming from where, which are very interesting. But I really want to answer the question in the sense of what information is missing in order to stop the weapons from a very operable point of view. And here I think the lack of transparency itself is the issue. The fact that the German authorities are giving one information to their own workers at the arms companies, the docks, the trains, the trucks that are delivering the weapons, and different information in their testimony to the International Court of Justice, and a third kind of answer to the media questions about the arms deliveries, and a fourth answer to members of the parliament of the then someone is lying. And I think the lie itself is illegal, and it has to be traced to the person who is lying, because those people must be made accountable. Once German officials will understand that international law prevents them from sending weapons to Israel, and that some members of the government have been knowingly and actively deceiving the public and deceiving the International Court of Justice about the delivery of weapons, then this will have an immediate impact. No one will want to go to prison in order to obey an illegal order to deliver weapons to Israel. So we will see action from the unions, we'll see action from on the ground, from the workers, and I think that's the this is the important point. We need to really ask the question to the members of the German government that has exited recently and members of the current new German government who is giving false information to whom and what kind of accountability is there to them, because Germany is obligated under international conventions to have proceedings according in its own judicial systems against officials who are breaking the law. And if it fails to do so, then it becomes a matter of international jurisdiction. I think everyone in Germany, at least in the establishment, in the government, would want very, very much to avoid

the implementation of international jurisdiction because Germany fails to uphold the law on its own citizens. So This is the first part of the question. But the second part of your question was about the discrepancies in languages. This is part of the reason that we know that there are lies. And I think here, the way that the information comes in the different languages is qualitatively different. It's quality. The Hebrew information that I'm collecting is not by far the most reliable one. Because of course, it's not that I'm saying, oh, if an Israeli newspaper published something and it must be true, because of course, the Israeli media is completely complicit in the genocide and providing, publishing propaganda and disinformation. In his speech at the UN, Netanyahu made some comments about babies being burnt alive. Everyone knows this is a lie, but he didn't say it to the UN. He said it to his own people, because anyone who reads Israeli newspapers don't know it's a lie. They still believe those fabrications. And this nevertheless doesn't mean that the Hebrew media is not useful, Because in the Hebrew media, there are a lot of discussions by Israelis who are not aware of what's happening in the world. They're not aware that they can be talking about a specific weapon and that the information that they are discussing has legal ramifications. Because if they don't know what's happening in the world and they don't know about the ICJ cases and the ICC cases, then they don't know that they should be careful about publishing this information. In the English media, I see much better coverage in the sense that even in the United States, which is currently having a very, very repressive regime, I don't know if it's even precedented in its history, but there are still a sense among journalists that it's their duty to criticize the government and to publish information. So we get, even from very right-wing publications like the Wall Street Journal, factual information, what kind of bombs the U.S. is giving Israel, how many, when were they delivered. This is information that is not to be found in Israeli media unless they translate from English, and also not in German media. And then the German media, we have a very serious problem in Germany of just unquestioning loyalty of journalists to the government, to the establishment. They don't think that they should be asking critical questions. They don't think that they need to express any opinion that is not the opinion of the ruling party. This is just very, very sad political traditions in Germany. But because of this, the sources in Germany are mainly just reflecting the official position of the government and the official information that the government is willing to release. So when we are trying to find the discrepancies, it's through navigating these three languages and these three sources. And this was a very long introduction, and I will just give one short example to say that the German Government has constantly reiterated that it has not yet authorized the sale of tank shells to Israel. The tank shells that were considered as an export item to Israel, the 120-millimeter shells, have never been officially included in the exports and not even in official answers to the press. Yet this year, there was an interview with Israeli soldiers in the attack battalions, and they were complaining that the new shells coming from Germany were not as good as they expected. So I mean, again, I'm not saying that the Israeli media is particularly accurate and trustworthy, but these were testimonies by Israeli soldiers who are talking about the new tank shells coming from Germany. So this really raises a very serious question.

Ruth Rohde

We have seen basically the German government pretending that, that they are barely contributing anything of use when we see these other sources saying, big other things and you were already mentioning a little bit about those collaborations with Rheinmetall, with Dynamit Nobel and others with Israeli companies. I mean, one other, I think, key example that often gets brought up is the manufacturers of the engines for the Merkava tank and the transmission systems for those are made by a company, Renk, also in collaboration to some extent with Israeli companies. So I just wanted to know...

Shir Hever

I can maybe add to this story just a short video that was published by the Israeli military in which they, it's a Hebrew video in which they proudly show how they are putting together the Merkava tank. And in this video, you can see the engine and they say, here is the engine of the tank. You can look at the video and see MTU written on each and every of the internal combustion chamber of the engine.

Ruth Rohde

Yeah, I think it's one of those things where it's one of those things where there isn't really even a denial. I think of this particular element. But my question was more if you can just talk a little bit about the role of German imports and the technology collaboration, especially in terms of also components and expertise for, like, what's their role for the Israeli arms industry? Could they really not do without this German tank engine, for example, or this this Rheinmetall collaborative cannon development or what's the situation basically?

Shir Hever

Yeah, I think we need to really understand how industry works. It's not just the military industry, but really how technology works. It's not just that you have a blueprint and you have a factory and you have the materials and somehow it gets all assembled, but rather it's many, many years of experience and dealing with different problems. And Israel has a long history of military trade with Germany, which goes more than 50 years into the past, where after Adenauer signed the reparations agreement with the Israeli government, the Israelis said, would you mind giving us the reparations not in the form of money for the Holocaust survivors who live in Israel, but rather in the form of weapons and Adenauer was very happy to create jobs for the German arms industry. But then Israel also returned the favor and started exporting weapons to Germany, especially after 1973, the war in which Israel fought the Syrian and Egyptian armies, which were equipped by Soviet weapons. And Israel could share the experience. And then you really see how the technology is exchanged. What caliber of cannon is needed in order to punch a hole through a Soviet armor. And this very close collaboration goes on many different levels. The fact that Germany is installing pods radar and navigation pods into the Eurofighter jets that it has made by an Israeli arms company called Rafael is because the technologies can talk to each other, because the Germans trust the Israelis with military secrets. And Israel is exploiting this, of course, to develop products and compete with European companies. So if this collaboration will stop, it means not

just an immediate stop of necessary components and technologies, but it harms the supply chain throughout its entire process. So every factory, every worker in the arms industry knows that this collaboration creates job opportunities for them in the future, that whatever experience that they're making as they are developing weapons for Gaza are experiences that can be monetized for the next arms fair, where they will show a new ability of the missile or the drone that they're developing. And every block that we are able to put, every country that says, no, we are not interested in your genocidal weapons and we're not going to collaborate with you, is a blow to the Israeli arms industry and a blow to the supply to the Israeli military both in the immediate term, but also in the long term.

Ruth Rohde

Right. I think to the surprise of many, in August, the German government actually said, we are now no longer licensing certain or like new arms exports basically to Israel that could be used in Gaza. Now, this has sometimes been reported as Germany stops sending weapons to Israel. And I just wanted to know, basically, what do you make of this government statement and announcement?

Shir Hever

I think my own perspective on this is the timing, first of all, because it was Friday, August 8th, which was just a couple of hours until the Israeli, after the Israeli cabinet made the decision to embark on Operation Chariots of Gideon II, which is the current operation in Gaza, the complete occupation of Gaza City, and the deployment of divisions of reservists in Gaza. And I think this has been closely observed by the German authorities, by the German government, and Germany has various organizations that advise it on Israeli politics, like the SWP [Science and Politics Foundation, editor's note]. informing the German government that this is a very controversial issue within Israel. There is a conflict between the chief of staff and the government. The Minister of Defense of Israel warned the military that the military has to comply by the orders of the government because the military brass, the high command, didn't want to go on this operation at all. And when the Minister of Defense is saying something like this, you know, this is often one step before a military coup. Which is not the case in Israel, but certainly I think that when the government said we ignore all of the warning signs, we ignore all the international pressure, we ignore even the protests from inside Israeli society and the Israeli military, as inside conduct more devastation and death in Gaza for our own purposes, then the German government reacted within hours by making this statement. which is a statement. It only refers to weapons that are being used in Gaza. And then, of course, there's the question of does the German government even acknowledges the fact that the warships that it is selling to Israel have been used to bomb Gaza and, as you mentioned before, to enforce the blockade and prevent humanitarian goods from reaching Gaza through the sea. And if they say we don't see it, we ignore it, we don't acknowledge it, then this doesn't apply to the warships. And also, they only referred to future armed deliveries and not to existing contracts. And when a question was raised about this issue in a press conference of the government, the speaker of the government said, we cannot bend space and

time. We cannot cancel the existing contract. But this is a very disingenuous answer because the region of Wallonia, the state of Wallonia within Belgium, already in February 2024, so a year and a half ago, has declared that they are absolutely canceling the existing arms contracts, export licenses, because it's illegal to send weapons to Israel. And it's noteworthy also to mention that when Wallonia did this, they made themselves open to a lawsuit by Elbit Systems. Elbit Systems said, we have a contract with you. They could have said, say, you violated the contract, so we're suing you. But Elbit Systems didn't sue. because they knew they were going to lose because international laws is clear on this issue and it's stronger than the contract. Germany doesn't seem to understand this, or the German government doesn't seem to understand or doesn't want to understand this point. So they are still allegedly honoring the illegal export licenses that are in place. And the third issue, which I think is important to consider, is that Merz, in his statement, only referred to weapon exports, but Germany has this weird distinction between weapons of war and military equipment, as if engines for tanks are not considered weapons of war. But in addition to this, there are all the dual-use items. And there's been quite a lot of dual-use items that Germany has been providing to Israel, even proven to be used for military purposes, like the pressure regulator from the air conditioning company Jumo in Fulda, which has been installed in a rocket and fired on the Nura Shams refugee camp in July 1st, 2024. There is a photo showing the Jumo component and the German government, the company never acknowledged this, never said that they will stop selling pressure regulators following this atrocity. So again, it's a statement. I do think that even if behind the statement there is very little action, it is nevertheless important. It is a step forward. We should not make little of it. Because first of all, inside Germany, everyone are getting the feeling that the winds are changing and the unions, the workers in the arms companies and the companies that deliver the weapons know that they have to, it's not so simple to send weapons to Israel and even the Chancellor had to put some restrictions in place. And second, inside Israel, the statement was used to call for a ceasefire, to call attention to the fact that the resources are limited to continue the genocide. So in the same way that Netanyahu quoted Merz after Merz made this horrible comment that Israel is doing Germany's dirty work in bombing Iran, now Israeli journalists were saying, oh, now the Israeli tanks will not be able to go anymore because they won't have any more engines. And even if this is perhaps a little bit of an extrapolation or wishful thinking on behalf of these journalists, it is something that the Israelis are reading and thinking when they're being called for reserve duty or asked to support the war.

Ruth Rohde

Yeah, I think that's a really interesting point, the sort of messaging it sends, even if it's not, even if it doesn't have the sort of actual physical impact that we might want it to have. It's worth noting that Germany has in the past withdrawn existing arms export licenses to Saudi Arabia after Saudi Arabia murdered Jamal Khashoggi in 2018. There are a lot of sort of legal debates around why that was possible and why it wouldn't be possible because of this weird distinction that you're talking about with the war weapons and the non war weapons. But it's a really important point that you mentioned that international law, constitutionally in Germany, trumps these

administrative rules that make the German government think that they are prevented from withdrawing existing licenses, of which they issued hundreds of thousands, if not millions worth, just a few months or just in the month leading up to these decisions, which is also something I think that's really interesting in terms of how they set themselves up to have licensed a bunch of things just to then put this pause. So since we're talking, we talked a lot about direct, like arm supplies and licenses and those kinds of things. But I think one of the things that is even more ignored is the role that European countries, and especially Germany, play in being a hub for the transit of American arms shipments and other arms shipments to Israel. So I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about that and sort of the role that European countries, in particular Germany, are playing as transit hubs?

Shir Hever

Yeah. Well, this is a very big topic. The U.S. is the biggest supporter of Israel and the biggest provider of weapons to Israel, but it doesn't have the ability to send weapons directly to Israel. The weapons have to be transited through Europe for various reasons. One of the reasons is that the big cargo planes, the C-17 planes that the U.S. is using, are very old, and if you have a plane like this which is carrying 100 tons of ammunition, then the plane is basically a flying bomb and has to be to fly very carefully and must make sometimes fueling stops or repair stops along the way, and then it would be in Europe. So there are nine countries that have been flagged by the BDS movement as the nine transit countries which are used to transit the weapons, which are Belgium, Cyprus, Greece, Netherlands, Germany, Spain, France, Ireland, and the UK, and Portugal. Portugal has some bases also in the Pacific, in the Atlantic Ocean. So these are, and these countries are very important. And in all of these countries, there has been protest. Some governments, Spain and Portugal most notably, have said, we will not allow the transiting of weapons. Ireland has already a law that prevents transiting weapons to the Shannon Airport, but there is an exception to this law, that when a plane carrying weapons reports a technical problem, then they would say, okay, we'll let you land because we don't want the plane to fall. So now a group of Senators in Ireland are legislating a bill which would say that if a plane is allowed to land in Shannon Airport because of these technical problems, then the weapons will be on board will be confiscated, which I think is a great idea and will prevent the U.S. from using this loophole in the future. And then you have, unfortunately, Germany with the Ramstein Airbase, which is half of it is a NATO ex-territorial airport, half of it belongs to the German Air Force. But in any case, Germany has a responsibility to say that its airspace cannot be used to transit weapons to Israel. Portugal and Spain have already said this and implemented this as a policy respecting international law. It's shameful that Germany isn't respecting international law. And what if I may refer again to Netanyahu's speech at the UN that he gave just now, his plane coming to flying to New York had to go a very long, roundabout way because he couldn't fly over European countries who denied him use of their airspace. So it is possible to do it. And if the European transit countries will also deny the U.S. the use of their airspace to transit weapons to Israel, it would really impact the ability of Israel to receive weapons from the United States.

Ruth Rohde

I think that's a really interesting point. I think recently there was also an investigation by journalist Jossi Bartal into the role that also civilian, I think FedEx flights, it was through Germany, played in the supply of F-35 components. And there are the Irish outlet, The Ditch, have done a lot of work on this. And we, in fact, we did some work with them on, or I did some work with them on the role of Slovenia, which has a full arms embargo in place now against Israel. But before that, one of their major ports or their major port was a transport hub of weapons and even now we're sort of monitoring how this embargo is enforced for the transit of weapons, especially also from Southern Germany and Eastern Europe. But in terms of Eastern Europe, I was actually interested to hear your perspective on why it is, why do you think it is that, at least in my perspective, there's been a lot less attention on exporters to Israel from Eastern European countries such as Serbia, such as Romania, but also countries further afield, like India. I think there's even more to that story than just the drone connection. I think there were some ships that BDS was targeting for the transport of explosives from Tamil Nadu. So I was just wondering, If you think this impression is incorrect, or maybe what we could do to increase also attention on these suppliers, I know that there are some local groups who are trying, but are really struggling.

Shir Hever

Well, you've named three countries, and I think each one of them has its own story. And we need to really talk about them as separate cases because they really are unique in their way. India is a country with about 8 to 16 million people who are members of the BDS movement, who are supporters of BDS. So there are, the BDS movement in India is gigantic. There are a lot of people who support Palestine, but the regime in India is very right-wing, very Islamophobic, a close ally of Israel, and not willing to adhere to the calls to respect Palestinian rights. Also, India is not a signatory to the ATT, the Arms Trade Treaty, so they are not reporting about the weapons that they are trading with Israel. And yeah, this is a... And also there are a lot of geopolitical elements here because India pursues a policy in which it maintains good relations at the same time with China, Russia, Iran, and the West. So the whole idea of imposing sanctions is an antithesis to their foreign policy. But nevertheless, we have, because of the public support, the general feeling among people in India that the colonial genocide that Israel committing is something that resonates with their own history. That's why we have informants. telling us here's a ship that has just docked in the Chennai port in India and was loaded with weapons to Israel. These informants are taking a very large risk. So I'm not going to share any more information. But the reason that we have informants is because of the work of grassroots organizations, of protest organizations, people who help spread the word. And this is a lesson for us in Germany. where whistleblowers or informants will not be punished on the same level as they are in India. Now, Romania, I don't have information about weapons or components that Romania is selling to Israel so much, but Romania is certainly buying a lot of weapons from Israel and financing Israel's war machine by those purchases. [Editor's note: Since this interview, Romania published its arms export report for 2024, which does include arms sales to Israel]. And also, Romania has become a sort of vacation spot for Israeli soldiers who are taking a break from genocide. And most countries in Europe or in the world would

arrest these soldiers and deliver them to be tried at The Hague. But Romania is willing to turn a blind eye, which is very unfortunate. And this is but I'm happy to say that in Romania there is a new awakening of Palestinian solidarity and BDS groups that are now establishing themselves in order to change this. Serbia, as a third example, at some point, Serbia has surpassed Germany as the second biggest provider of weapons to Israel. For a couple of months, this was the case, which were towards the end of the previous coalition in Germany, where the Nicaragua case scared the Germans into pausing some of the arms deliveries, and Serbia stepped up and started selling a lot of 155-millimeter shells. The only source I have to prove that Serbia has been selling specifically this ammunition and not something else is from Hebrew sources. And Serbia has a contract with or an agreement with Israel that Israel does not recognize the genocide in Srebrenica and Serbia doesn't recognize the genocide in Gaza. So it's a pact of genocidaires. And Israel has also been relatively friendly to Serbia during the Yugoslavia wars for various reasons. So there is a history there. And I think that's also one of the reasons that the attention to this has not been so great. And Serbia is unfortunately also not very strong in terms of Palestinian solidarity groups and BDS groups. It's really a nascent movement in Serbia. And you can immediately see the difference, because people have supported Palestine, they have brought Palestinian flags to the demonstrations, and then in Belgrade. And then the President Vucic announced that he will stop selling weapons to Israel. But pretty much the next day it became clear that this announcement has been an empty an empty promise and Serbia continues to sell weapons to Israel.

Ruth Rohde

Right. I mean, to go back maybe one step, I mean, it's very important, I think, what you're saying in terms of the massive amounts of work that people in different countries have been putting in, which has led in multiple countries at this point to this new kind of position where some governments like Germany, like the UK are applying sort of, let's call them partial suspensions or partial embargoes. The sort of position that seems to be taken there is that only weapons that could be used in Gaza specifically, often not even referring to the West Bank, but just Gaza shouldn't be exported to Israel. But arms that could be used, for example, for training or for air defense or those kinds of things should still be exported to Israel or components as well. What's your take on this approach that governments are taking or some governments are taking?

Shir Hever

Well, I think it's a cop-out because anyone who makes a statement like this is assuming that the public is not intelligent enough to know how armies work and to know that military functions as a system with a lot of different elements. And military strategy is based on calculations that include also the ability to train the soldiers and also the ability to have air defense, and that if Israel wasn't armed to the teeth with air defense interception missiles, it would not have launched an attack on Iran in June that killed over 1,000 people in Iran. It would not have launched a series of attacks in Sana'a in Yemen, again killing a lot of civilians. This is only possible because they have this air defense system that allows them to attack with impunity,

so it's part of the system. And there are also reports from the Israeli military where soldiers are complaining that because of the growing military embargo and because it's not possible for them to get enough propellants, for example, for their shells, they are using propellants that say on the packaging, this is only for training purposes. So it's very nice that Germany is writing only for training purposes on the propellants, but if in the end it's used to propel a shell that falls on a residential building and kills families of civilians in Gaza, then of course Germany cannot claim that they have not nothing to, no blame in the matter because they wrote it's only for training purposes. There are, there is evidence, there are reports by the Israeli soldiers saying we are using these training propellants to fire at Gaza.

Ruth Rohde

Yeah. I think, again, to sort of go back just a little bit, the way also that the Israeli arms industry is set up, you've talked about this already, the way that it was quite niche and it relies on certain specific imports, or the Israeli military rather relies on certain specific imports. But I am kind of curious, like, what the position of the Israeli arms industry is in creating the conditions for this genocide to continue. Like we are hearing a lot about Israeli companies selling sort of battle-tested weapons. You yourself have already talked about this a little bit earlier. But I've also heard you say before that the ongoing genocide has meant that Israeli arms companies actually have had to put some of their lucrative sort of international contracts on hold while they supply their own genocidal army. So I guess my question is, do Israeli arms companies sort of see the genocide as actually good for business? And if so, what influence would they have on the government for continuing the genocide and refusing a genuine ceasefire?

Shir Hever

Yeah, this is a very big question because the so-called laboratory model, which there's a movie called *The Lab* by Otam Feldman. There's a new book, relatively new, by Anthony Loewenstein, *The Palestine Laboratory*. The implied argument there is that the arms industry is profiting from the occupation and therefore is also lobbying the Israeli government to continue the occupation so that they will have more examples of how their expertise is used to repress people and then regimes will want to buy these technologies. To some extent, this is true, especially in places like Brazil or India, where repression of large civilian populations by very harsh policing is the desired technology. But the genocide is something else. The genocide is a different technology and is a different policy. I think that, and I couldn't really find in many years of research any evidence that the Israeli government is being influenced by the arms industry in deciding its repressive policies in Gaza. Many times it actually did take action that countered the interests of the arms industry. For example, the Great March of Return [a 2018-2019 series of protests where Palestinians non-violently approached Gaza's border with Israel to demand the right of return of Palestinian families displaced in the creation of Israel in 1948, note from editor]. The snipers were given Israeli-made rifles in order to injure protesters without killing them. There were unarmed protesters. It was a peaceful protest. And the snipers themselves decided to disobey orders. They put aside the non-lethal guns,

and they took American-made sniper rifles that were very lethal and used them to kill over 250 people. And not one of them was punished by the Israeli authorities. So the Israeli government had a policy of allowing the snipers to kill at will. This certainly facilitated the way for genocide by giving the soldiers the right to kill whoever they wanted without any implications. But it didn't serve the interests of the arms industry because the Israeli arms companies were complaining that they're using American weapons and not Israeli weapons. So this is a complicated question that you're asking here. I also think that if we're asking the Israeli companies now, is the war good for business? The answer is overwhelmingly yes. They are celebrating the war because they're saying we have so many orders. It's wonderful. But I don't believe them. I think they're saying it because they're desperately trying to convince investors to invest in them. They're trying to say this is a good thing for us, because they are very, very short on capital, and because they are being divested from so many pension funds, especially the Norwegian pension fund, which is the biggest pension fund in the world. But many other banks and churches and unions are divesting, and universities are divesting from them. So they need to get investors, and they're telling us that the backlog that they have of tens of millions of dollars worth of or hundreds of millions or billions of dollars worth of arms exports that they're not able to fulfill is a good thing because eventually they will fulfill them all. But I do think that it's more likely that eventually some of these customers will just try to get their weapons elsewhere. So in that sense, it's not. But there is also a very complex cultural and political and societal process in Israel. The arms industry represents a certain part of the population, which is more the people who wanted to have Zionism being a strategic and effective long-term policy of ensuring Jewish majority in Palestine and domination. But now you may find some of those senior members of the arms industry in the demonstrations against the government in Israel, because they're saying what Israel is doing now is not strategic, not long-term thinking. It's self-destructive. So they're certainly not caring about the lives of Palestinians, but they do think that the new kind of elite that took over in Israel, the far-right populist elite, is not interested in things like exporting the weapons to the rest of the world, and rather only interested in expanding the borders of Israel and getting rid of the indigenous population.

Ruth Rohde

Right. I mean, there's so much more I think we should talk about when it comes to also Israel's role as an arms exporter globally. But I just wanted to sort of wrap up a little bit with some of the things that we already started out with in terms of campaigning. You used to be the military boycott coordinator of the Boycott Divestment Sanctions campaign, which is the BDS campaign, which we've talked about, which has been mentioned a few times. Could you like talk a little bit about say a few words, just a few words, really, about BDS's strategy for achieving a military embargo on Israel during the genocide.

Shir Hever

Yeah. BDS is a movement with very clear demands and very clear methods. It adheres to international law. And because it adheres to international law, the strategy

has always been very, very clear to use international law as a tool. So the way that BDS works is by building a grassroots movement of people who support Palestinian rights and conduct a consumer boycott. But you cannot use consumer boycott to stop weapon shipments, or sometimes you can with specific companies that are making weapons and also civilian things or are invested in the arms industry and so on. But the consumer boycott is not the most effective way to achieve a military embargo. Then you have the, at the second stage, you bring more the civil society organizations, the universities, the unions, the legal structures, the lawyers, and that is where you come to this step of divestment, the D in BDS. And finally, when you've built a movement on the grassroots level and on the civil society level, you can really influence government decision and policies, and this is where you get the sanctions. And military embargo is a sanction. So when I joined the BDS movement, well, I actually joined the BDS movement 20 years ago, but when I started working as a member, as a coordinator for the BNC, the Boycott National Committee, which steers the BDS movement, as the military embargo coordinator, I thought, well, the military embargo is going to be the last thing we achieve. right? Because it's a sanction, it comes at the end. The governments will be very, very late after the public opinion has shifted to impose sanctions. So my work is more long-term. But I didn't expect there to be a genocide. I didn't think it's going to happen so fast. And when it started, then governments really did start to take action, and the military embargo started to gain momentum very fast. By using a lot of legal texts, there are a lot of very good articles written by prominent lawyers and promoted through UN officials and international courts. And when people see that the legal obligation is so clear, it makes it much easier also to build a movement around it and to get people to support it. So yeah, I mean, the BDS has always organized protests in front of supermarkets or in front of retail stores to calling to boycott products from Israeli companies that are exploiting Palestinians. And suddenly, we had mass demonstrations calling on governments to impose a military embargo on Israel. This is very, very quick, fast development.

Ruth Rohde

Yeah. I mean, within this development, are there sort of a few strategies or examples of campaigns that stand out to you, that have stood out to you in how effective they've been in preventing arm sales to Israel? And if so, maybe why do you think these ones were particularly effective?

Shir Hever

Yeah, there are so many examples, but I just want to give one, which is Spain, because I think this is an example that really encompasses all the different levels and has also achieved tremendous results. Now, every time I say this, my friends and colleagues from Spain are very angry because when I give them praise for having such effective campaigning and being so successful, they always remind me that it's not enough and there's more to do. But this is part of this energy that made it possible for the activists in Spain to achieve so much. So I take their criticism gladly. But I think that the way that they did it is, first of all, by planning. They were very strategic. They planned before they took action. And then their plan encompassed all

the levels that I mentioned before, starting with grassroots organization, but also getting the media involved, getting lawyers involved, getting the unions and the universities, so that the grassroots action very quickly escalated and got a lot of press coverage. And very, very quickly they got to the level of government and talking to government officials and political parties. And I think about the party, political party Sumar, which is a junior member of the coalition. It's very small. But nevertheless, critical for the majority of the socialist coalition. And Sanchez, the prime minister, was not our friend. Sanchez, when he took power, was very pro-Israel. But Sumar said, we don't accept it. We demand that this government impose a military embargo. And Sanchez said, but you are small. You don't get to dictate the government policy. And of course, they used all the arguments that the BDS movement has given them, which is it's obligated by the law. It's the moral thing to do. We have to do it. But nevertheless, he said, why should I listen to you? The only thing you can do is resign from the coalition, and then the government will fall, and there will be new election. The right wing will get to power. Is this what you want? Are you going to topple the government? And they said, well, in times of genocide, our political career is not the most important priority. And they called his bluff. So Sanchez had no choice. And from a pro-Israeli politician in Europe, he became the one who called on the EU to impose military embargo on Israel and started to implement more and more steps. And every step starts with the grassroots protest, with some articles in the media, with lawsuits by lawyers. Everything is coordinated with the BDS groups. And then eventually the government takes action. And every time this happens, there's also a report about this in the Hebrew media, which I'm following as well, as I see that they are seeing the ring tightening around them. And many Israelis started to hear about this and responded by saying, but why is Spain even relevant for us? We didn't even know that Spain is the arms provider to Israel. We were interested only in the U.S. and Germany. But then the Israelis are getting a crash course about how the military industry works and how important it is. And of course, this goes beyond just the immediate legal obligation to stop an arms shipment and gets to the point where Spain says we have to be proactive, meaning that we have to re-examine and maybe suspend the association agreement with Israel for trade because it also includes dual use items and because it violates international law in other ways. So eventually, the pressure is very effective.

Ruth Rohde

Right. Well, thank you. That's a great story that I think many can be inspiring. And I see many of these elements in other countries and in other movements as well. So that's amazing. Is there anything else that you think should be mentioned at this current moment that we're in.

Shir Hever

No, I just think that if this is an interview that's going to be read and listened to by Germans, then I think Germans really need to think about the responsibility to take action and to understand that you don't have to be a government official to take action. You don't have to be, but whatever you are, there's something that you can do to help stop the weapons, even if it means just joining a demonstration against

the arms shipments to Israel, because those demonstrations change public opinion. If they're done strategically and wisely, and they should be done strategically and wisely, using slogans that are permitted by the police. We're not trying to create provocations just for the sake of provocation, but we're trying to really tell the German public about what these weapons are doing. And eventually, even the very obedient German unions and journalists and dock workers and airport workers will have to see the reality in front of their eyes.

Ruth Rohde

Great. Well, thank you so much. That was really informative. And I hope that people can take a few things away from it for their own understanding of how these things work and to find their leverage where we can really act to disrupt this trade and death in this current moment where it's so important. So yeah, thank you so much for that. And I'm sure we'll speak again soon at some point.

Shir Hever

Thank you, Ruth.